

Doug's Landstuhl Autobiography

11 Mar 2016

Mike,

Luckily I kept the email from Doug so I can forward it to you. :) I am attaching the bio that Doug gave me some time ago. (2014). He wrote this bio while he was in Germany rehab facility. The last two pages are stories he created to scare himself into not drinking. The pages are entitled "Your Next Bottom". The stories are clearly untrue, just a way to use aversion therapy to redirect the desire to drink. I really enjoyed reading about his childhood, which is why he "owed this to me". He wanted to share a piece of his world from that moment in time, long before we met. At this point (prior to marrying Suzanne) he was doing pretty well.

Below is the email he sent me with the info on it.

Mindy

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Mindy, I owe you this. My "autobiography" as well as an exercise we ran on defining when "your next bottom" will happen. It came true. ;-)

Written circa February, 2009 at the Landstuhl, Germany ATF (Addiction Treatment Facility). These were the good guys, like you and unlike the people at the Ramstein ADAPT clinic.

- Drippy

Lt Col Doug Blackledge
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-----Original Message-----

From: douglas.blackledge@us.af.mil [mailto:douglas.blackledge@us.af.mil]

Sent: Tuesday, August 19, 2014 12:21 PM

To: BLACKLEDGE, DOUGLAS F Lt Col USAF AFSPC 45 OG DET 3/XP; BLACKLEDGE,

DOUGLAS F Lt Col USAF AFSPC 45 OG DET 3/XP

Douglas Faust Blackledge Autobiography

I was a military “Brat”, but even more than that, I come from a long history of military men and exceptional achievers. In short, I’ve had a lot to live up to. And that could very well be the core of what’s caused the majority of angst in my life.

I am the number one son of the number one son of the Captain. My Grand Dad, Captain Alan Blackledge, USNA Class of 1920, was the patriarch of his family, with 5 children. They all wanted to be the best for the Captain, which always led to intense (but loving) rivalry amongst the siblings. Unfortunately for the 3 oldest siblings, they were not boys. They immediately lost that competition once my Dad was born.

And so, the legacy continued. My Dad, USNA Class of 1963, had a full 20 year career as an Air Force officer (he saw the light and cross commissioned out of Annapolis). He met my mom as a young lieutenant, and I was eventually born to them while my dad was teaching, ironically, at the U.S. Air Force Academy that would become my Alma Mater nearly 22 years later.

My childhood was happy. I didn’t have any bizarre experiences or abusive situations. I was a fairly mild mannered kid that had normal friends. The first move I remember was from Virginia to Las Vegas (age 5) then Vegas to Albuquerque, NM, just before my 9th birthday. I thought that timing was pretty cool because I got to have one birthday party in Las Vegas, then a second one in Albuquerque which helped me meet new friends quickly. My Dad retired in ABQ, so that’s where most of my growing up occurred.

I enjoyed playing with my friends in the neighborhood. We lived in the foothills of the mountains, so there was a lot of outdoor activity. We rode our bikes on the mountain trails and climbed rocks a lot. I had a tendency to be a little bit whiny. I cried to my parents when things didn’t go my way. Then one day I had the proverbial boy who cried wolf experience. I was playing on the large boulders in my backyard. I tried to jump from one boulder to grab onto a railing supporting the deck on the back of my house, slipped and fell onto the cement porch below. My wrist was broken, and I ran screaming into the house. My parents told me to quiet down and sent me to my room to “calm down.” I eventually managed to remove the wristband concealing the 90° angle where a straight arm should have been. My mom rolled her eyes and called my Dad over: “Oh, shit, Mike. He really did break it!” I didn’t cry as much after that.

My Dad pushed me to do well, or at least to give my best effort in everything I did. He was obviously proud of me when I did well, but didn’t get on my case if I wasn’t the best, or if there was somebody who was better than me. He did, however, know if I hadn’t given 100%, and I carried the shame I felt from his uncomfortable silence. I was always harder on myself than he was. So I guess if you’re looking for that secret psychological deep seated thing, that’s probably it. I never felt like I was

quite good enough, because there was always room where I could have done better. And here's the kicker: when I was doing the best out of all competitors, whatever the arena (sports, academics, social standing), I managed to sabotage myself somehow because I didn't ever feel like I was worthy of being the king of the mountain.

So I moved on from my "normal" childhood and typical happy but occasionally awkward teenage years, 4 years Varsity Soccer, 3 years wrestling, National Honor Society, Conversationally fluent in Spanish, graduate in the top 5% of my high school class, blah blah blah, etc. etc. Perfectly groomed to continue my destiny as the number one son of the number one son of the Captain.

I entered as one of the 1000+ initial members of the U.S. Air Force Academy Class of '92. All of the sudden, I was surrounded by people like me. Not all exactly the same, but they were all high achievers. I finally didn't need to self sabotage. Things weren't so easy for me anymore. I found myself having to work extremely hard to compete with my peers on every scale! I loved it! I thrived on it! I was gloriously ... Average!

I began to make friends, and over time as our weekend privileges expanded, we started going out partying to relieve our mutual pent up stress and frustration. I found a unique comradery in having drinking buddies that had the same angst I felt. And we took care of each other. We never left a man behind. Dump him into the trunk of the car in freezing cold if you had to, but we made sure everyone was back in time for the next formation.

It was the norm at most of our parties to drink like fish and get a little crazy, so we did. It's just that most of the guys quit drinking when they felt tired or felt they had enough. I just wanted to keep going.

I think my first blackout was during college, but I don't remember (no joke intended). By the grace of God, I managed to graduate relatively unscathed with my commission.

I followed my girlfriend to my first military assignment where she had already been established for a year. I quickly met her group of friends, and much more friends of my own, mostly associated with Friday nights at the Club. I had a built-in designated driver with my girlfriend. I thought that was a pretty good deal, so I married her. (OL, there were several other reasons.) The partying continued, but since I was free from the "Zoo" (college), I was an "adult" now, so I kept my own booze at home as well. The daily routine began: Get home from work, wife was still working, I was bored, so I started to have a few drinks. For a few years, it remained pretty mild drinking, with a few stints of complete non-drinking. Then I went to pilot training. My wife had to stay at her assignment, so I was living on my own. Work, study, study, drink, and repeat. Drinkers seem to seek each other out, so those of

us that drank hung out together and encouraged each other, both in studies and in drinking.

After pilot training, we moved to my first flying assignment. I excelled as a co-pilot, and seemingly to me, I was one of the “good guys.” I would have a few beers with the other pilots after work, listen to their stories, etc. We all deployed together, strengthening our bond, and getting together more frequently for social gatherings, usually involving lots of drinking.

My drinking at home increased to the point that my wife started making comments about it, checking the levels of my bottles, etc. So to keep her from bitching, I did the logical thing and started stashing my booze. She was happy because she saw me only have 1 or 2 drinks a night. She never saw the 5 or 6 others I had while I was “working on the car” or “doing yardwork” or “taking the dogs for a walk.”

My flying skills increased, as did my levels of responsibility and supervision in the squadron, the Wing, and the Air Force. Shop Chief, Flight Commander, “18th Wing’s #1 helicopter tactics expert,” COO of the Qtr. All the while drinking a little bit more and more, and having to hide it even more.

I got stationed back in my hometown of ABQ with the task of teaching young special ops aircrew how to become hardened terrorist killing warriors. I was at the top of my game, at least it looked that way from the outside. Really, my life and sanity were crumbling because of booze. I was just really good at hiding it.

While in ABQ, I got to spend some time close to my family. And, after a few years there, I got to watch my Mom die an alcoholic. We were all devastated. My Dad was very strong about it. What I think I realize now is that he was probably relieved that it was finally over. He wasn’t chained to a spouse that was chained to a bottle. Of course, hindsight’s 20/20. I wish that had registered more strongly with me at the time, because my wife was chained to me and my bottle in the same way. The only difference is that she didn’t wait around for me to croak, she had the strength to break the chain. Or, probably more truthfully, she was just too tired to hold on to the chain anymore and she just let it go. So (my bottle and I) sunk to the bottom of our sea of booze and she floated away.

So now I’m in Germany, flying a desk. I have been medically disqualified from flying status for 2 months now. I intend to pursue a waiver, recently motivated by this program. Life will go on. It won’t be perfect. There’s a lot I’m still learning and figuring out. But I will press forward, work as hard as I can and make the most of what God has presented to me.

Your Next Bottom

Dear Doug,

I can tell you're headed for a relapse because you think you've got it all together. You're meeting attendance has been dwindling, maybe even stopped all together. When is the last meeting you went to at Landstuhl or V-web? You haven't been to at least 2 meetings in one week! Either you think you can do this all by yourself without continued support (violating steps 2 & 3), or you're back to thinking that maybe just a few drinks here and there are OK (violating Step 1). Get back on track, dude. Because if you don't, here's what could happen.

Scene 1: You've been on your last, final, final, final chance for awhile. Everything had been going smoothly so you take M&S out on a week vacation. You're away from "the microscope", so you enjoy a few drinks sitting at the vacation hotel's café. No harm done, so you go out sightseeing. You sneak a bottle w/ you so you can keep the buzz going while you're out there. No one pays attention to the water bottle you keep sipping from on the tour. After the tour, it's time to drive back to the hotel. S mentions something, asks if you're OK, you seem a little quiet. Then she asks if you've been drinking. You deny it. Now you're pissed off because she's "nagging", so you stop at a gas station and get more to drink. Blacked out on the A-bahn, you wake up around flashing lights, look out to see S being helped in the Ambulance, hysterical and Marc's stretcher being picked up, then carried away into the waiting ambulance with her.

A few days later, after repeated "I'm sorry's" and "please forgive me"s with nothing but silent tears as a response, you find S one evening, lying in the bath tub, empty pill box on the floor. Her now gray body is under the cold water. There's no chance to revive her. Anyways, you took all of her life from her earlier when she got the call that Marc didn't make it.

Scene 2: You're late for work, some sad story about car problems, on a traffic jam. You look like shit. You smell even worse. Stares from the office. Not pity or shame, just looks of disgust. You're escorted to go officially breathalyze, but you know what it will say. All of the dreams you built w/ S. The life you were going to have together. You try to explain to her why you can't stay. How do you explain SOFA? How do you explain that once you're departed, the chance of you getting a Visa back to Germany are practically NIL? You know she can't leave. All she ever wanted was to have a happy, simple life with you. She trusted you. She finally could open her heart to someone again, and that person was you. You totally destroyed her.

Mindy: Thanks so very much for sharing this bio with me. Not only had I never read this before, I did not even know it existed. An excellent exercise, it appears to me, for the Landstuhl Addictive Treatment center. And it all rings true to me.

I had not really thought about him being the first born son of a first born son, all military folks (although I might well have pointed that out to him). We (family) always considered Doug to be the 'golden boy' - nothing he could not accomplish (except perhaps riding a unicycle, which he attempted inside to the detriment of the paint condition of our hallway at Stalgren Ct.).

I'm glad he kept this, and was able to bring it out and share it with you.

Toni, the Girl Friday at Doug's lawyer's office, called me Wednesday to see what they could do for me. I asked for copy of Doug's final email: Apparently on 7 Jan he went to lawyer with signed agreement and a check for \$5,000, to get the divorce proceedings underway. That was the 'progress' he was calling to report to me that evening, when I (to my great shame, for reasons that appear oh so petty to me now) did not take his call, let it go to voicemail.

Toni told me they mailed out the agreement to Suzanne's lawyer on 8 Jan, and received reply on 12 Jan that Suzanne did not agree with the idea of leasing out the Careywood house. Doug's lawyer Jeff sent email to Doug on the 12th, saying 'what is this about?' Doug replied on 13, something like, "Not true; that is more of Suzanne's BS" or words to that effect.

Anyway, Toni has since checked with Jeff, and citing attorney-client privilege, they won't be forwarding that email to me. Thus I am particularly appreciative that you forwarded Doug's bio.

On another front: In early Jan 2015 or so, I sent email to family encouraging all to create a Turnover Notebook. Doug thought that was a great idea, but interpreted it differently: he said if the Coors beer truck were to run over him (my metaphor for untimely departure), he would like his estate to go to a 'combo.' [This is why I am convinced Doug did not have, actually never had a will]. The 'combo' was a fat percentage to Robin, a skinny percentage to Simone (my terms fat and skinny; he gave numbers, but changed them in subsequent emails), and some to Ian and Charlene Blackledge, David's kids, to assist them in obtaining their college educations.

Well, next weekend Robin travels to Germany on business. I've asked her to carry Euro 1,000 to Simone, as I think Doug would have wanted something to go to Simone. (Robin may well still get Survivor Benefits). Strange how this Life works out - who would have thought that Doug's ex-wife could be the courier to Doug's ex-girlfriend.

Mindy, thanks again so much for sharing Doug's bio with me - I will read it again and again, I'm sure. I wonder if it would have helped if Doug would have posted it on the fridge at Careywood.

- Mike

mike.blackledge.com



Mindy P <himindy64@gmail.com>

3/11/16

to Michael

Mike,

You are very welcome. So was a will ever found? Will his estate go solely to Suzanne?

I'm so glad you found some enjoyment in the bio...as did I. As I told him in the text I sent you... it was like seeing a peek of his younger days. He was quite a wonderful person. Stubborn, but wonderful.